

Outsiders Included

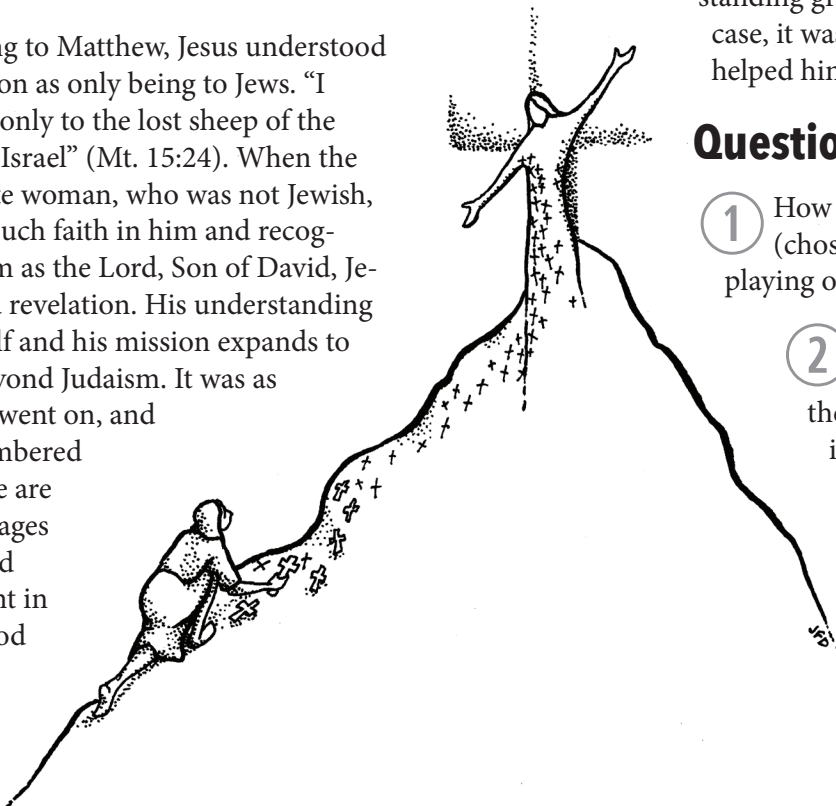
This Week's Readings at Mass

- Isaiah 56:1, 6-7 • The Lord's house open to all
- Romans 11:13-15, 29-32 • Israel's final conversion; the triumph of God's mercy
- Matthew 15:21-28 • Faith of the Canaanite woman

This Gospel story often puzzles us because of what sounds like a disrespectful and harsh reply from Jesus to a woman's plea for help. Some find it troubling because it suggests that Jesus wasn't perfect, and a woman had to help him learn something new and change his mind. The story makes more sense if we understand more about the Jewish context Jesus was living in during his day.

A strong streak of teaching in the Old Testament instructed Jews to keep themselves separate from non-Jews so that they wouldn't be tempted to stray from their worship of Yahweh to other gods. They weren't supposed to marry anyone outside of their faith to help maintain their Jewish purity. They were proud to be God's "chosen people," and it was a short move from believing themselves to be the chosen ones to relegating others to being less-than because they weren't chosen.

According to Matthew, Jesus understood his mission as only being to Jews. "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mt. 15:24). When the Canaanite woman, who was not Jewish, showed such faith in him and recognized him as the Lord, Son of David, Jesus had a revelation. His understanding of himself and his mission expands to those beyond Judaism. It was as if a light went on, and he remembered that there are also passages in the Old Testament in which God tells the people that



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"So shall your way be known upon the earth; among all nations, your salvation."

Sheepish Question:

How do I experience God's natural creation praising his name for all to know?

he is for *everyone*. We heard an example of that in the first reading today when Isaiah, speaking for the Lord, said that foreigners could "join themselves to the Lord"—which is exactly what the Canaanite woman did (Isa 56:6). Yes, Jesus was divine, but he was human too, and just like any human, his understanding grew and matured over time. In this case, it was a foreigner, and a woman, who helped him become who he was meant to be.

Questions of the Week

- 1 How do you see the notion of "insiders" (chosen ones) and "outsiders" still playing out in Christianity today?
- 2 What is your reaction to Jesus changing his mind because of the faith of this woman. Do you find it troubling in any way? Or do you find it heartening? Please share.

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